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## Notes

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### “NI MEA CURA RESISTAT” (VIRGIL, *AENEID* II. 599–600)

Quos omnes undique Graiae  
Circum errant acies, et, ni mea cura resistat,  
Iam flammae tulerint, inimicus et hauserit ignis.

A striking parallel, which does not seem to have been noted by editors of the *Aeneid* in their comment on this passage, is Lucretius v. 207. Lucretius has been speaking in his usual strain of the imperfection of the actual world—“tanta stat praedita culpa” (l. 199)—and as evidence of it cites the fact that the greater part of the earth is uninhabitable. Of all that the sky covers, he says, a large part is possessed by mountains and woods, the home of wild beasts, and by the sea. Then two-thirds of what remains is rendered uninhabitable by excessive heat or cold. And,

Quod superest arvi, tamen id natura sua vi  
Sentibus obducit, ni vis humana resistat,

“As to what land is left, even that nature by her own violence would overspread with brambles, should human force fail to resist.” That this is a contingency that might very well happen, according to Lucretius’ view of things, we know. For, as he believed, “the great globe itself, yea, all which it inherit” were decaying and going toward destruction. Cf. iii. 1173 f.:

Nec tenet omnia paulatim tabescere et ire  
Ad capulum, spatio aetatis defessa vetusto.

In the long period of decline, there naturally would come a time when the *vis humana* would become unequal to the task of resisting the ceaseless encroachment of Nature.

The passage in Virgil is commonly explained in our school editions, wrongly, I think, as a contrary-to-fact condition with present subjunctive for imperfect in the protasis. So the editions of Greenough and Kittredge, Frieze (revised by Dennison), and Harper and Miller. The use of the present for the imperfect subjunctive is explained either as a poetic archaism or as a picturesque use of tenses for the sake of vividness, or indeed as both at once. This last explanation seems to be an attempt to have one’s cake and eat it, too. For, if the construction is a poetic archaism, then it is not used for the sake of vividness. At least, in the Plautine examples of this construction there seems

no reason to suppose that the present is consciously substituted for the imperfect for artistic effect, but rather the present subjunctive in such conditions is a survival of an earlier and wider use of that tense. Cf. Hale and Buck, *Latin Grammar*, § 581, *d*, Remark.

A greater difficulty than that involved in the use of the present subjunctive, *resistat*, in the protasis of the sentence under consideration, is found in the verbs of the apodosis, *tulerint* and *hauserit*. These are regarded by the editors of all the school editions of Virgil that I have at hand, and by Virgilian editors generally, so far as I am aware, as perfect subjunctives. Yet this use of the perfect subjunctive, whether we regard it as an archaism for the pluperfect (Greenough and Kittredge) or as an "instantaneous perfect" (Knapp), can hardly be paralleled. An interesting discussion of this and kindred passages in the *Aeneid* by Dr. Heinrich Blase, one of the editors of the new historical Latin Grammar, may not have come to the attention of many teachers of Virgil, as it was published in a *Gymnasialprogramm* (*Studien und Kritiken zur lateinischen Syntax* von Dr. Heinrich Blase, II. Teil, *Beilage zum Programm des Grossherzoglichen Herbstgymnasiums zu Mainz*, Mainz, 1905, pp. 16 ff.). According to Blase, the starting-point for the interpretation of our sentence should be in the assumption that *tulerint* and *hauserit* are future (perfect) indicatives and not perfect subjunctives. The condition would then become a so-called "mixed" one, corresponding to the type *si sit-erit (fuerit)*, a type which Blase shows by a careful historical statistic to be a current one in Latin literature from Plautus to the post-classical epoch. The real sense of the condition, Blase thinks, is as follows: "Lass meine Sorge fehlen, so werden die Flammen sie im Augenblick weggerafft haben."

Blase objects to the interpretation of another German scholar, Cauer, according to which Venus in saying *resistat*, rather than *resisteret*, wishes to awaken Aeneas' anxiety (*Angst*) which would have been quieted had she used a form which implied the certainty of her continuing to resist. But this dramatic heightening of the effect is, it seems to me, quite consistent with Blase's own interpretation of the sentence as an ideal, and not an unreal condition.

That it should be so regarded is confirmed by the Lucretian parallel already discussed. The passage in the *De Rerum Natura* was probably before Virgil's mind when he wrote "ni mea cura resistat." The likelihood of this is shown, not only by the resemblance in words and rhythmical position, but also by the fact that Virgil in two places in the *Georgics* seems to have Lucretius' expressions in mind:

*Georgics* i. 197-99:

Vidi lecta diu et multo spectata labore  
Degenerare tamen, *ni vis humana* quot annis  
Maxuma quaeque manu legeret.

and ii. 411:

Bis segetem densis obducunt *sentibus* herbae.

*Haurire* in this sense of "devouring flesh" or "drinking blood" is moreover a Lucretian word. Cf. Conington on Virgil, *Aen.* ii. 599 and Lucretius v. 1323.

Three other conditions with present subjunctive in protasis occurring in the first six books of the *Aeneid*, which are generally interpreted as contrary-to-fact conditions, are, I think, better taken as ideal, or "less vivid future" conditions. These are:

*Aen.* i. 58-59:

Ni faciat, maria ac terras caelumque profundum  
Quippe ferant rapidi secum verrant que per auras;

v. 325-26:

Spatia et si plura supersint,  
Transeat elapsus prior, ambiguumque relinquat;

and vi. 290-94:

Corripit hic subita trepidus formidine ferrum  
Aeneas, strictamque aciem venientibus offert,  
Et, ni docta comes tenues sine corpore vitas  
Admoneat volitare cava sub imagine formae,  
Inruat, et frustra ferro diverberet umbras.

On the last, Ladewig's interpretation, quoted with approval by Blase (*op. cit.*), may be cited: "Indem der Dichter sich die Lage des Aeneas lebhaft vergegenwärtigt, stellt er es nur als möglich hin, dass Aeneas mit gezogenem Schwerte einen Angriff auf die Gestalten der Unterwelt unternehmen möchte." i. 58-59 is also placed by Blase in the same category with ii. 599 and vi. 292, and though he does not mention the condition in v. 325-26 in this connection, it seems clear that it belongs to the same type. In this sentence *plura* should perhaps be taken not as a comparative, but in its frequent general sense of "many." Though one who knew the end of the race might expect a contrary-to-fact condition, the spectator, from whose point of view the whole passage is written, could not know whether or not there would be sufficiently "many spaces" to enable Diores to pass his competitor.

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